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ABSTRACT

Christians have a limited understanding of the contemporary Jewish community in its variety, devotion, contribution to character, and perception of its heritage. This research project contrasts family cultural patterns of the Orthodox Jew to those of select white middle class Christian families in America (especially Catholics) to help foster intercultural understanding and communication among them. Separate chapters dealing with birth, growing up, marriage, death, child-rearing practices, and kashruth (dietary laws) are compared and contrasted for the Orthodox Jew and the Christian family. A curriculum for Orthodox Jewish culture is presented outlining films, documentaries, novels, and short stories that can be studied to get a better understanding of the Orthodox Jew. Other activities, including a museum visit and celebration on holidays, are suggested. An introduction to a culture capsule and an analysis is presented. A culture capsule is an instructional device consisting of a conversation or descriptive narrative in which specific cultural features identified with a selected group of people are deliberately constructed for the purpose of analysis. (SK)

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AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL PATTERNS AMONG ORTHODOX JEWS AS CONTRASTED TO THOSE OF SELECT WHITE MIDDLE CLASS CHRISTIAN AMERICANS

Prepared by

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PREFACE

The IRES Institute is dedicated to the philosophy of fostering inter-cultural understanding and communication among people.

This paper attempts to pursue this goal by contrasting the rituals and traditions associated with the rites of passage for the American Orthodox Jew with the White Middle Class Christian American.

It is hoped that this information will prove particularly valuable for all educators and professionals devoted to the development of a culturally pluralistic philosophy.

Acknowledgement should be offered to the following participants for their research in compiling this monograph.

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INTRODUCTION

In contrasting the American Orthodox Jew to the White Middle Class Christian American the first objective required is an operational definition of the age old question, "What is a Jew?" Although Christians use the Old Testament in studying the background of their own faith, Christians still have a limited understanding of the contemporary Jewish community, in its variety, devotion, contribution to character and perception of its heritage. Most Christians if asked would tell you that Jews are people who never accepted Christ as the Messiah. Although true, this definition is too simplistic, because there are many things to be considered in trying to understand Judaism.

According to Yaffe (1968), there are two differing views of Jewish communities outside of the land of Palestine. Galut, or exile reflects the notion that the Jewish people were expelled from their national home as a punishment for their sins and that Palestine is their natural dwelling place. Only there can the Jew be complete. Tefutshah or dispersion is a more neutral word which suggests that the Jewish dispersion from their native land was due to historical circumstances

beyond their control.

From the Babylonian conquest of Palestine in 568, B.C. the vast majority of Jews have lived under the national domination of other people. In America, the settlement of Jews can be divided into three periods: The Sephardic (1654-1840), the German (1841-1880) and the National (1921-present). The present Jewish population in the United States is approximately 6,000,000 or 3 percent of the population. Eighty percent of these reside in cities of over 100,000 population.

Purpose: To contrast family cultural patterns of the Orthodox Jew to those of select White Middle Class Christian Families. Emphasis is placed on the following areas.

A. Birth

B. Coming of Age

C. Marriage

D. Death

E. Child Rearing Practices

F. Kashruth (Dietary Laws)

Objectives:

I. Given materials dealing with Orthodox Jewish Family Life as contrasted to the White Middle Class Christian American Family, Students will be able to identify cross-cultural differences.

II. Given exposure to selected activities, students will demonstrate an awareness of the rich diversity of the Jewish Tradition.

Evaluation: Students will be asked to view films and different forms of multi-media (T.V., music, radio, plays, etc.) which will be discussed by students and evaluated by the instructor through observation.

Students also will be given culture capsules and mini-dramas to be portrayed and discussed thoroughly. This will be evaluated by the instructor's observations so that proper recommendations can be presented to the students.

BIRTH

BIRTH

Before we discuss the ceremonies connected with birth, we felt it would be interesting to begin with a short study of the Jewish and Catholic views toward birth control and abortion, two topics which are highly relevant in today's society and which are viewed differently by these two groups.

When a Jewish couple marries they make a promise to fulfill the mitzvah of "be fertile and increase."[1] However, the couple reserves the right to plan their family as they choose. Birth control does not pose a religious problem as long as they do plan to have children at some future time. In fact, the Jewish faith has no restrictions on the type of birth control a couple decides to use; even the "pill" which many religions condemn, is all right to use since it "does not appear to violate the injunction against the destruction of seed."[2] The decision of the number and timing of children is totally left up to the individual couple who realize the great responsibility involved.

In contrast to the Jewish views on birth control, a Catholic couple has no such freedom when they marry. The Catholic Church regards as sinful any attempt to

prevent conception by artificial means with the intent to control the size of the family.[3] The reasons for this vary. First of all, according to Catholic doctrine, the conjugal act is one of procreative love and requires total self-giving. Since "contraception frustrates procreation and falsifies married love, it is intrinsically evil."[4] The Catholic Doctrine endorses the belief that using contraceptive devices can encourage sexual practices not included in the marriage contract -- marital infidelity or simply sexual acts performed solely for pleasure or for other self-centered purposes which are contrary to a true and lasting love.[5]

In discussing abortion, it is necessary to begin by giving a few simple definitions to make the explanations clearer in the mind of the reader. The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home[6] offers five:

direct - a deliberate effort to remove a fetus

criminal - performed with the intent to destroy an unwanted child

therapeutic - performed to safeguard the life or health of the mother

indirect - a non-deliberate loss of a fetus resulting from an act performed for a different purpose

spontaneous - not deliberate; a miscarriage

Members of the Jewish faith are rather permissive about abortion up to the thrid month of pregnancy. The most common reasons for performing an abortion at this

stage are the possibility of giving birth to a deformed child, and if carrying the baby to full term would cause psychological damage to the mother. Even after the first three months of pregnancy a therapeutic abortion is permitted in certain instances. The stage of pregnancy is of little importance in this matter. The Jews believe the health of the mother to be more important, the reason being that the fetus is not considered a living soul until birth. Up until that time he is a potential life.

It is hoped that the reader does not believe from the preceding statements that the Jews permit abortions to be performed at the whim of the mother or of anyone else. On the contrary, they strongly believe that one must <u>not</u> tamper with a potential life for reasons of convenience, economics, or for personal reasons.[7]

The Catholics, on the other hand, believe that any abortion (with the exception of a spontaneous abortion which cannot be controlled and an indirect abortion resulting from treatment or surgery) is immoral and criminal -- murder -- since the immediate result is the same in each of the types defined earlier: the direct taking of the life of an <u>innocent human being</u>. Let us here note that the Jewish philosophy (as stated above) teaches that the fetus is not a human soul until birth. The Catholics believe the fetus is a human being with

a soul much earlier. In the event of an indirect abortion, there is no question of crime or immorality. A pregnant woman may receive any treatment or surgery which she would have needed if she were not pregnant even though such treatment may invariably cause an abortion. This sometimes occurs in a mother who undergoes an appendectomy and who in the process loses her child.[8]

These attitudes toward abortion follow the mother into the delivery room where complications sometime arise. If a problem does occur which necessitates making a choice between the life of the mother or the child, Jewish law puts the mother's life first until part of the child's body has emerged from the womb at which time the child has a soul and is now considered before the mother.[9]

The Catholic mother has even less chance of surviving a crisis in the delivery room since her child is a full human being before birth and any attempt to save her by destroying the child or his chance of survival would be murder. It is contrary to Christian morality to do something evil in order to achieve a good result.[10]

The Jewish people view the birth of a child as a blessing from God. The parents are fully awsre of the obligations they have to the child. Their role

is an important one since it is the parents who must provide the loving care, physical attention and the moral guidance their children require.[11]

The mother's responsibility to her child begins even before the child is born. In the Bible (Book of Judges) there is a section which refers to the conduct of the pregnant woman. There is a reference made to the warning given to Samson's mother that she must not drink wine while with child for this will affect the child's character.[12] It is interesting to note that this passage indicates that even in ancient times the mother's diet was believed to have an effect on her child's health and personality.

According to Jewish law, a child is born pure and free of all sin.[13] During the course of his life he may be led astray but it is the duty of the parents to guide him. This concept is significant since Catholic law teaches the exact opposite -- they believe a child is born with the "original sin"[14] which is a consequence of Adam's sin when he ate from the forbidden fruits and, thus, causing him and all his decendents to loose the supernatural state which God had intended for all men.[15]

In order for the child to be absolved, he must be baptized. Baptism defined is a "ceremony of initiation by which one becomes an actual member of

the Church (Christ's Mystical Body), wiping out both original and actual sin and giving grace."[16] The actual ceremony is performed by a priest who pours water on the head of the recipient of the blessing and says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16:16).[17] The parents and the godparents are present and they must, at this time, profess their own faith and promise to give the child a religious education.

One Jewish rite which has no parallel in the Catholic Church is the Pidyon Haben or, the redemption of the first-born. The first-born son was offered to God for the purpose of leadership and counsel and now he must be redeemed, thus giving up the leadership to the Kohen (priest). The ceremony, which takes place on the 31st day of life, except on the Sabbath or festivals, symbolically transfers the leadership from the child to the Kohen. It is performed, basically, by the father paying the redemption money to the Kohen who either returns it to the father or donates it to charity.[18]

The Pidyon Haben is required if: (a) the child is the first-born and opens the womb, (b) the child is a male, and (c) the father is not a Kohen or a Levi, nor the mother a daughter of a Kohen or a Levi. If any one of these three conditions is not present, the ceremony is not required. For example, in the case

of a first-born male child born by Caesarean section he is not required to have a Pidyon Haben because he did not open the womb.[19]

There are no Jewish laws which govern the naming of the child. However, it is customary to give the child a Hebrew or Yiddish name (relating to the Bible, God or the Jewish people)[20] which is used for religious purposes and Hebrew legal documents, even though the parents may select a gentile name for birth records and everyday use. The Hebrew name provides the child with an identification with the Jewish people and their faith. On their legal documents the name would appear as follows:

name ben (son of) father's name

name bat (daughter of) father's name

If the father is of Priestly or Levitical descent, the title Ha-Kohen or Ha-Levi is added to the name.[21]

Many children are named after a deceased relative whose memory they wish to honor and preserve.[22] This, however, is up to the parents who may rely on local custom.

None of the references used had any mention of laws concerning the naming of a Catholic child. However, in a survey of primary sources we found that some parents prefer to name their children after the Saints, which are numerous. The child's name is used during the

ceremony of Baptism when he becomes an actual member of the church. See also "Confirmation" which will be discussed later under the heading, "Coming of Age."

While the Catholic child (both male and female) officially gets his name during the ceremony of Baptism, the Jewish people have different procedures for naming children of both sexes. The female child is named in the synagogue when her father is called to the Torah on the Sabbath following her birth.[23]

The naming of the Jewish male-child occurs during a ceremony called the Bris which is the Hebrew word for covenant or agreement. The Bris is a religious act, not simply a surgical procedure, and takes place on the 8th day after birth, even if this day falls on the Sabbath or a holiday.[24]

The Bris is one of the oldest rites in Jewish ritual and its origin can be found in the Torah.

> "This is My Covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be token of the covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations.[25]

The Bris began when Abraham, pledging to God that he would observe His ways and follow His percepts,

circumcised his son Isaac. Today, the father of the child appoints a Mohel (a specially trained person who observes all the details of the law in relation to the Bris) to perform the circumcision. Today, the Bris still signifies the bond of unity for the preservation of the Jewish people.[26]

FOOTNOTES - BIRTH

1. Donin, Rabbi Hayim Halevy, 1972
2. Ibid.
3. The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home, 1965
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Donin, 1972
8. The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home, 1965
9. Frieman, Donald G., 1965
10. The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home, 1965
11. Donin, 1972
12. Frieman, 1965
13. Donin, 1972
14. The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home, 1965
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Frieman, 1965
19. Donin, 1972
20. Frieman, 1965
21. Donin, 1972
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

FOOTNOTES - BIRTH (Continued)

24. Glazer, 1967

25. Torah (Genesis 17: 10-12)

26. Glazer, 1967

15

COMING OF AGE

COMING OF AGE

A child's initiation into adulthood is an important event in his life. It is at this time that he becomes responsible for his own actions.

The Jewish boy looks forward to his Bar Mitzvah on the first Sabbath after his 13th birthday on the Jewish calendar.[1] It is at this time that he is first called upon to participate in the Sabbath service by leading the congregation. Wearing the prayer shawl and the phylacteries, he reads aloud the section of the Prophets assigned for that particular day. He offers the appropriate blessings and then his father gives a benediction. It is a very joyous occasion. The Bar Mitzvah marks the beginning of adulthood -- the boy can now make vows, take a place when a group gathers for community prayers, fast on the Day of Atonement, and be accountable to God for his actions.[2]

Even though the actual ceremony of the Bar Mitzvah is a relatively new ritual (approx. 14th century), the term is found in the Talmud (Laws of the Jews). According to the Talmud a Bar Mitzvah is "any Jew who observes the commandments."[3] In ancient times it was understood that a boy could be called to read the Torah

when he was old enough to understand it and the ritual involved.[4]

Another ceremony which made its appearance recently (in the 20th century) is the Bas Mitzvah. Essentially this ceremony is equivalent to the Bar Mitzvah in that it gives the Jewish girl recognition as a Jewess. It is an acknowledgement of the understanding of her role that her education and religious training have given her. It gives her equal status with the male. This seems to fit in nicely with today's Woman's Rights Movement.[5] The Bas Mitzvah is becoming increasingly popular among Jewish families, religious schools, and synagogues who wish to mark the religious turning point in the young girl's life. As long as there are no violations of the laws in the Talmud, there are no objections to this innovative ceremony.[6]

Both the Bar Mitzvah and the Bas Mitzvah ceremonies are usually followed by a great feast and gifts for the honored girl or boy.

The ceremony of Confirmation rather than being based on tradition has been adapted from the Lutheran Church by the Reform movement in Judaism. Prior to the formulation of the Bas Mitzvah, the Confirmation was used to demonstrate the formal Jewish education received by the girls. Today, however, Confirmation is done with a group of teenagers who have already

received their Bar or Bas Mitzvah (usually at the age of 15 or 16). It is a ceremony in which the children of Israel confirm their acceptance of Judaism and it serves to stimulate their interest in religious education beyond the Bar and Bas Mitzvah.

Each congregation has its own rules about the qualifications for the ceremony and when and how it is to take place. However, it usually takes place at Shavous which falls at the end of the school year. It seems fitting to hold Confirmation at this time since Shavuous marks the acceptance of the Torah by the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. The young people symbolically accept the tenets of Jewish law now that they have a basic knowldege and understanding of Judaism.[7]

The Catholic Church recognizes two ceremonies during which a child marks the beginning of a new phase in his life as a member of the Church.

In 1910 St. Pius X (Pope Pius) decreed that all children should make their First Holy Communion at the age of 7 for it is at this age that they possess reason. Communion is defined as "the reception of the Body and Blood of Our Lord present in the Holy Eucharist."[8] Although this was general practice for many years, age of reception of this Sacrament has

since been decreed optional, and is often decided by the parents. A reference to Communion is found in the Bible in the Book of Luke 22: 19-20.

> 'This is my body which is being given for you...This cup is the new covenant in my blood which shall be shed for you.'[9]

Communion continues throughout Christian life, however, the First Holy Communion is celebrated as an important event for the Catholic child.

It is not until a child receives the Sacrament of Confirmation that he is brought spiritually to adult age along with all the duties and responsibilities of a full Christian in the social life and action of the Church, and gives him the full gift of the Holy Spirit. This usually occurs around the age of 12, but this is not a strict rule. In order to be confirmed, a child must be Baptized in the Faith, receive his or her First Holy Communion, and receive substantial religious instructions. These instructions are given during the elementary school years of the child.

The Sacrament is administered by a Bishop or a duly authorized priest who extends his hands toward those being confirmed and anoints their forehead with Chrism (olive oil mixed with fragrant balsam and blessed by the Bishop) in the form of the Cross.[10] During the course of the ceremony, the recipients choose the name of a favorite saint to add to their own.[11]

FOOTNOTES - COMING OF AGE

1. Frieman, 1965
2. The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home, 1965
3. Frieman, 1965
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Donin, 1972
7. Frieman, 1965
8. The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home, 1965
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Survey of primary sources.

MARRIAGE

MARRIAGE

Selecting A Mate

Rabbis encouraged people to marry and multiply, but to exercise extreme care in selecting a partner for life. The following are guide lines from the Talmud and Proverbs from the Bible concerning marriage and selecting a mate.

Talmud

1. Hasten to buy land, but be deliberate in selecting a mate.
2. He who weds for money shall have unworthy offspring.
3. Marry not a woman for her money or beauty, for these vanish and damage results.

Proverbs: Bible

1. House and riches are an inheritance from fathers; but a sensible wife is a gift from the Lord. (19.14)
2. It is better to dwell in a desert land, than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife. (21.19)
3. He who finds a wife finds good fortune, and wins a favor from the Lord. (18.22)

Days In Which Marriages Can Be Performed

Marriages can be performed on any day of the year except the following:

1. The Sabbath

2. Passover, Shavuous, Sukkos, Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur.

3. In the course of Jewish history, the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuous have been marked with many tragic events. During the year 135 C.E., many massacres of Jews took place. It is considered by most Jews as a semi-mourning period in which weddings are curtailed. (Frieman, 1965)

In a Catholic wedding, marriages were not allowed to be performed on Ash Wednesday and the following days until Easter Sunday.

Erusin

Erusin ceremony was the formal engagement of the couple. It differed from the modern concept of engagement in that a formal bill of divorce was necessary if the engagement was broken. The Erusin ceremony was the formal declaration of the couples intentions. Much hardship would befall the bride-to-be if the wedding would not take place, so this is the reason for the bill of divorce in the Erusin ceremony.

Also formulated at the Erusin ceremony was the Kesubah. (Marraige Contract)

Nesuin

Nesuin was the formal marriage ceremony. Nesuin comes from the Hebrew word meaning "carry". The bride was carried or escorted to the home of the groom. (Frieman, 1965)

The Orthodox Jewish wedding of the present combines in one service the old formal engagement, which is immediately followed by Nesuin Ceremony. This is not the case in a Catholic wedding. The only requirement that must take place is the posting of the marriage banns for three consecutive weeks.

Wine

The Talmud Sages say that no religious ceremonies should be celebrated with beverages other than wine. (Epstein, 1972) The bride and groom, during the wedding ceremony, sip wine from the same cup to symbolize that they will share together all the pleasures and joys, problems and sorrows that their futrue life awaits for them.

Wedding Band

The wedding ring is placed on the forefinger of the bride's right hand so that everyone can witness this act clearly.

The Jewish law prescribes that the wedding ring should be a solid gold ring. The reason for this is so the bride may enter into marriage without any possibility of deception. That's why jeweled rings are not allowed to be used as wedding rings.

Ketuvah

The Ketuvah is the marriage contract. Its' form makes clear the fact that marriage was a contractual relationship between both parties.

It would be misleading to base a marriage contract solely on materialistic things. In the first place, both have to agree to the marriage; involuntary marriage was forbidden.

Presently in America the Ketuvah is frequently a symbolic document. No questions are about the virginity of the bride. There is no exchange of money between the father of the groom and the father of the bride. Only the giving of the ring by the groom to the bride. The Nedan or dowry has disappeared, but the form of the Ketuvah document remains unchanged. (Ausubel, 1974)

Aufruf

Aufruf means "to call up." On the Sabbath prior to the wedding day, the groom is called up to the Torah to honor his forthcoming marriage.

Kesubah (Marriage Contract)

In the year 80 C.E., it was the man's obligation upon marriage to give to the father of the bride a specific amount of money to be held in case of the groom's death or divorce. (Ausubel, 1974)

Today, the Kesubah is a religiously binding document attested to by two witnesses who declare that

they observed the ceremony and saw the bride accept the ring, thereby consenting to marriage.

Chupah

The Chupah today is the canopy under which the marriage service takes place.

The Chupah is supported at each of its' four corners by an ornamental pole. The material of its' roof is made of silk, satin or velvet, and embroidered upon it were the Hebrew rubrics:

> "The voice of the groom - The voice of the bride."
>
> "The sound of joy - The sound of gladness."

(Ausubel, 1974)

Breaking Of The Glass

In the year 586 B.C.E., the Babylonians conquered Palestine and destroyed the Lord's Temple. The Jewish people were carried into exile into the land of Babylonia. There the jews pledged that they would never forget what took place in Palestine, which is written in the 137th Psalm.

The groom recalls the destruction of the temple through the symbolic act of breaking a glass on his wedding day.

The modern Jewish weddings have accomodated themselves to the drastically changed circumstances of Jewish life in America. The American Jew has many different religious movements: The Orthodox, Chasidic, Conservative, and Reform, each of which has evolved its' wedding patterns. In America there has been an acculturation of traditional Christian customs. These have affected the liberal Jewish movements in the wedding ceremony. For instance, the bridal shower and double-ring ceremony are characteristics of marriage practices among Christians. (Ausubel, 1974)

Only at Orthodox and Chasidic Weddings are the ceremonies still the same as they were many years ago. One can still hear the old folk-tunes played by Klezmoriam (Folk-Musicians) that accompany the bride and groom to the Chapah.

The Traditional Orthodox Wedding Dances

The traditional Orthodox Wedding Dances are:

1. Hora
2. Mazel-tov tanz
3. Machulonim tanz

At Christian weddings one can usually hear modern music or music of the times, waltzes and music from

Broadway plays.

At an Orthodox wedding one will still find the Unterfihrer, (Yiddish for Escort) Selected for this honor were two married couples; one served as escort for the bride the other for the groom. (Ausubel, 1974)

At a Christian wedding the Unterfihrer would be comparable to attendants.

It is still customary at Orthodox weddings that as the bride, her parents, the Unterfihrer, and any other close relatives hold lighted candles in their hands and make seven circuits around the groom. (Ausubel, 1974) The reason for this is an old protective practice of the Cabalists for warding off evil demons.

Before the bride and groom may be wed, they must fast on their wedding day. This was an atonement for all their sins.

Although there have been many changes and borrowings from the 'American Culture,' the Orthodox Jew (more than any other) fights assimulation and altering tradition. They carry over most of the values and customs that their fore-fathers treasured. The Orthodox Jew reminds me of the Wailing Wall in Israel, lasting for generations upon generations.

DEATH

DEATH

All Orthodox Jews today follow the ritual patterns for the dead that was fixed by the sages after the destruction of the second Jewish Commonwealth (70 C.E.).

Death, as the Orthodox Jew conceives of it, does not end life, but returns the material body to dust. The soul, which is the part of God, returns to Heaven to begin anew in the world to come.

Life is the gift of the Almighty and only He, the giver of life, can take back His gift of life. Therefore, nothing should hasten death. (Ausubel, 1974)

This is a very contemporary and controversial issue pertaining to mercy killings and life. The Orthodox Jew is forbidden to hasten the death of a human being. A quote from Job says. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. (Job 1 21)

Onain

A person who is a close relative of the deceased is termed an onain. He is not permitted to perform any Mitzvos such as prayer or putting on Tephillin (Physlacteries).

An Onain (mourner) is not permitted to sit on a chair, bathe, participate in joyous celebrations, cut

his hair, study the Torah, or greet friends for seven days. This period is called 'Sitting Shiva.' The Hebrew word Shiva means Seven.

The first mention of mourning or Shiva is in the book of Genesis. When Jacob died, Joseph, his son mourned for his father seven days.

Preparation For The Funeral

The Chevra Kadisha (Holy Society) of the community is immediately notified of the death. The members of the society prepare for Taharah, the ritual cleansing of the body for burial. They wash and cleanse the body.

After the body is washed and dried, it is wrapped in a white linen shroud sewn with large loose stitches. If the deceased was a pious Jew, like the Orthodox Jew, then he is wrapped in his prayer shawl (tallit) with one of the fringes cut to symbolize that the dead are not responsible for observing the mitzvos.

Perhaps the single most non-Jewish burial practice of the Gentiles is:

A. If a man, he is usually buried in a black tuxedo or suit.

B. If a woman, she is buried in an evening dress.

Then the body is placed in the coffin in front of which mourners may pass to pay last respects and/or pray. The coffin may or may not be open. The religious custom of

the formal attire for the deceased is related to the basic belief in Christianity of the immortality of the soul and on after life. Therefore, it is both a time of sadness and joy wherein the deceased is attired appropriately to meet his Savior.

The Orthodox Jews are buried in a coffin made of plain pine boards. It is not painted and shows all the imperfections of the grain. This symbolizes the imperfection of man on earth.

Instead of the coffin being nailed, as do the Gentiles, it is glued.

The reason that all Orthodox Jewish preparations for burial are the same is that it doesn't matter if the deceased were rich or poor, because in death the Lord declared, "All men are equal before God."

Funeral Service

A very simple service is prescribed by Jewish law as a symbol of resignation and acceptance of the judgment of God. (Frieman, 1965) Orthodox Jews have no liturgical or prescribed service for funerals. The Rabbi selects appropriate Psalsm.

When the Rabbi finishes the service, the mourners crowd around the grave. The coffin is lowered slowly while the Rabbi prays for the deceased. Then the mourners cast a little earth on the coffin of their beloved.

Keriah

Keriah is Hebrew means "rending' or tearing of the garment. After the funeral service, the immediate kin tear their garment in the upper corner to symbolize a death in the family.

Every mirror in the house is covered and turned to a wall. The reflection of a human being, whether seen in the water or in any polished surface is his soul. Thus, if the soul of the deceased should see the reflected image of any mourner, it might try, out of love, to snatch the live relative away to the other world. (Ausubel, 1974)

Another interpretation of the covering of all reflective surfaces is that looking into a mirror shows sings of vanity. One should not be concerned with the way one looks but with life itself.

When the mourner arrives home from the cemetery, the mirrors should be covered and he should immediately light a candle that burns for seven days.

Seuda's Havra-Ah

It is customary for friends or neighbors to prepare the first meal after the funeral. Jewish custom suggests that the first meal should include hard-boiled eggs. Eggs symbolize new life and hope for the future. Life must go on. (Frieman, 1965)

The Periods of Mourning

Jewish Sages have divided the period of mourning, in accordance with Biblical law, into three stages of varying intensity.

The first period, known as Sheloshim (thirty) relates to the first thirty days after a death.

The second stage embraces the twelve months from the time of the death to the end of the twelfth month.

Yahrzeit is the thrid stage and begins on the anniversary of the death of the individual.

Yahrzeit

A twenty-four hour candle commonly called the Yahrzeit candle, is lighted in the home in observance of this day. It is also the religious duty of the Jew to fast on Yahrzeit.

It is an ancient custom dating from the days of Jacob, who set up a tombstone at the head of the grave of his father in honor of the departed.

Unveiling of the tombstone is held at the end of the first year. It is customary to hold services at the grave site. At this service the Rabbi gives the dedication in memory of the deceased.

On the tombstone the name of the deceased is inscribed with dates of birth and death also with the relationship of the deceased.

Yizkor

Yizkor is a prayer memorializing the dead in the synagogue during Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeres, Passover, and Shavuous. The Hebrew word Yizkor means, "May he remember." Jews ask God to remember the deceased. (Frieman, 1965)

CHILD REARING PRACTICES

CHILD REARING PRACTICES

"Ye shall be fruitful and multiply," is the first commandment of the Torah. Jews want children, not only because it is written in the Torah, but because a woman is fulfilled or "made whole" by having children. Children are a joy, and a blessing.

The first months of the baby's life are surrounded with a tremendous amount of attention, warmth, and tenderness. The baby sleeps with its mother at first, then in its' own cradle or swinging crib which is very close to her. The infant is rocked constantly and if this motion is stopped he awakes and starts to cry. He is then picked up and carried. Often the mother will sing softly to him until he falls asleep again. The child is cared for by the mother or by a female relative. The father plays a limited role at this stage.

The baby is wrapped firmly in soft, warm clothes. This conveys tenderness, solicitude, and protection from the harsh world, light, cold air, and the "evil eye". The swaddling is also believed to keep the baby's legs and back straight. A few times a day these cloths are removed to permit the baby to move freely. The body is

also massaged. The baby is given a warm bath daily. This entire procedure is accompanied by tender cooing. The hair is brushed, and as soon as the male baby has enough hair, earlocks ("peyos") are shaped and remain there as long as he lives.

The young are carried around or rocked by older brothers and sisters. The mother continuously sings and talks lovingly. Father, older children and visitors coo and use baby language in a sing-song voice. The house is always filled with words. This helps the child enter more easily into the Jewish world -- which is extremely verbal. Words and talking come to mean warmth, affection and security while silence is associated with rejection.

Food is also associated with warmth and affection. The mother receives great pleasure in breast feeding her children. The baby is breast fed as often as he wants. When he cries the mother assumes he is hungry. If he isn't hungry the signal must be an indication of some other real discomfort. The immediate comforting and attending to the baby's crying is not considered "spoiling", but rather correct procedure.[1] In the average middle-class American family, on the other hand, a new born infant is frequently fed on a schedule rather than "on demand." It is not always taken for granted that the mother will breast feed today. Furthermore, the average

American mother places greater stress on sterilization of bottles and the baby's equipment than does the Orthodox Jewish mother.

In further contrast to the infant in the traditional Jewish family, the modern American parent would probably not pick up or rock the young child whenever he cried, particularly beyond three months. This would be considered "spoiling" the baby. However, the use of a pacifier is not uncommon to console or quiet down a crying baby.[2]

When the Jewish mother becomes pregnant again the baby must be weaned at once. He is weaned to a cup or a spoon. The child is never permitted to breast feed beyond the age of four since Jewish law prescribes that no "adult" may suckle at mother's breast. The child is introduced to solid food and, by the age of two, the baby sits at the table with the family and eats table food.[3]

It is also quite normal for the young child in the American family to sit at the table for meals with the rest of the family by the time he is a toddler. He eats table food soon after he has sufficient teeth for chewing and is encouraged to feed himself as part of his preparation for self-sufficiency.[4]

Toilet training of the Jewish infant begins a little before six months. Stress is placed on the fact that proper elimination is necessary for good health.

A young child is encouraged by words and praise if he does well. If he is 'naughty' the sound - 'pheh, pheh' is made to show disapproval. Early accomplishments such as standing, walking and especially talking, are a source of great pride to the parents. On the other hand slow development causes the parents private concern.[5]

The age of six months is concidered too young for starting toilet training by most American parents. One and a half or two years of age is closer to the expected age for such training. With regard to the baby's early developmental accomplishments, a similar sense of pride is evidenced in American culture.[6]

Greater mobility elicits increased concern on the part of both Jewish parents. Father now takes a greater interest in the child and even holds the baby in his lap while he studies. The child however will always be mother's baby. Mother continues to be concerned about appetite and physical well-being throughout the child's life.

Weeping is an acceptable show of emotion for women and children. Even men can display tears in certain rituals, although they are not expected to weep as freely as women or children.[7]

However, in the mainstream American culture, the attitude towards weeping is quite different. An open display of tears by boys and men is generally frowned

upon. A "stiff upper lip" would be more appropriate than weeping. In fact, one often hears a crying child told, "Don't be a cry baby, or "Don't be a sissy." American children are encouraged to be independent at an early age.[8]

In regard to the Jewish child's attitude toward the parents, this can be summed up in the Fifth Commandment, which states: "Honor thy Father and Mother." It is expected that children would be loyal and devoted to their parents and grandparents throughout their entire lives.[9] As to siblings, strong ties and deep devotion are always expected. Life-long loyalty and caring are adhered to in this close and warm family unit.[10]

The attitude toward grandparents (and older people in general) in contemporary American society is not generally based on devotion, care and respect. Rather, our society is youth-oriented. Often older people live on a fixed, low income. Many reside in a "nursing home," or residence for older people, rather than in the home of their children or grandchildren. The nuclear family is the basic unit of family structure.[11]

In essence, the Jewish family is the center of traditional way of life. It is the family unit which gives strength and vitality to the Jewish life. It is the family which has kept Jewish history and tradition alive.[12]

However, in contemporary American society, the purpose of marriage is not to preserve the heritage of the past or for building the future of society, but rather for the enrichment of lives in the present. The extended family is now far-flung. The nuclear family is all-important. The ideal family in our urban modern society is the independent, self-sufficient, self-contained one.[13]

The Jewish family is male oriented. The men are given central social responsibilities as well as dominance in intellectual and religious matters. Thus, in the family setting the rearing of children is the principal goal, especially male children and their education.[14] The father used to teach his son self-defense skills. It was also his obligation to teach his son some skill to permit him to earn a livelihood in his maturity.[15] It is the father's responsibility, too, to provide for his children's needs. But one of the most basic duties is his son's religious education.

The mother, too, is an educator. She oversees the development of the children's character and moral growth. She helps mold their behavior, as noted by the Biblical Proverb 1:8. "Hear, my son, the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the teaching of thy mother."

With regard to discipline, Jewish law specifies

that punishment must never be overly stern or cruel. Children are to be corrected with patience, love and reason, not physical force. It is believed that a healthy family atmosphere, growing from parental love, will engender a healthy attitude in children.[16]

It must be noted that most of these patterns of family life and interpersonal relationships described above in the Orthodox Jewish family stem from the Shtetle life (the life of the Jewish communities in small towns and villages of Eastern Europe.) These patterns continue to be by Ashkenazi and Hasidic Jews as they live in America today.

FOOTNOTES

1. Zborowski and Jerzcg, 1952
2. Survey of Primary Sources.
3. Zborowski and Herzog, 1952
4. Survey of Primary Sources.
5. Zborowski and Herzog, 1952
6. Survey of Primary Sources.
7. Zborowski and Herzog, 1952
8. Survey of Primary Sources.
9. Glustrom, 1973
10. Ausubel, 1964
11. Survey of Primary Sources
12. Kaplan, 1967
13. Mead, Margaret, 1965
14. Ausubel, 1964
15. Donin, 1972
16. Ausubel, 1964

KASHRUTH

KASHRUTH

The Orthodox Jew in particular, because of the difficulty in fulfilling all the laws, tends to live in fairly large, close-knit communities.

Orthodox Judaism is based on the Torah and the Talmud. A central conviction in Judaism is obedience to the Mitzvahs (or laws) laid down by God and given to Moses in the Torah. This body of law, known as Halakah, is intended to control every aspect of existence for the pious Jew, from the way he prays to the way he eats, from his ethical behavior to his sexual behavior.

There are 613 Mitzvahs or Commandments which were imparted to Moses (348 prohibitions and 248 positive precepts). All deeds have a liturgical significance and man must be conscious of his Maker at all times. A pious Jew wears an inner garment called a Tallis, which has fringes on its' four corners to remind the Jew of his obedience to God. (Kertzer, 1961). Every Jewish home has a Mezuzah fastened to the doorpost to serve as a reminder of God's will.

The Jewish laws that most people have heard about are those applying to food, the laws of Kashruth. According to Siegal et al (1973) these laws are based on

Leviticua 11:1-43, which tells which foods are regarded as Kosher. Verses 44-45 state, "For I am the Lord your God: you shall sanctify yourself and be holy." Verses 20:25-26 state, "You shall set aside the clean beast from the unclean."

The main dietary laws are these. All vegetables and fruits are Kosher and may be served with either meat or milk meals. Any fish that has both fins and scales is considered Kosher. Fish may not be cooked together with meat, but can be cooked in or with milk. Most domestic fowls are Kosher. Wild birds and birds of prey are treif. Treif is the word used for any food that is not Kosher. Not only are there restrictions on kinds of food, there are also rules about when foods may be eaten. To eat meat and dairy dishes in the same meal is not Kosher. A certain time must elapse after eating a dairy dish before a pious Jew will eat meat. Separate pots are used for cooking and separate dishes are used for eating these foods.

There is a special way that livestock must be processed according to the laws of Shehitah. This regulation is probably best observed when there is a Kosher butcher in the neighborhood. The Orthodox Jew when traveling must many times carry his food, utensils and dishes with him. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons that Jews coming to this country showed a tendency to

to congregate in large cities. Aside from kinship and friendship needs being more easily filled, it was more possible to observe these laws near a butcher shop that was Kosher.

The emphasis on dietary laws is reflected in traditional Jewish attitudes towards life within the family circle. The foundation of the Jew's moral strength is the family, which is regarded as the sacred foundation of all life, the heart not only of daily living, but of the religion itself. For this reason, almost all Jewish religious holidays place as much emphasis on home ceremonies as on the synagogue ceremonies. The fundamental purpose of the Sabbath is to reinforce family solidarity.

The Sabbath begins with the lighting of candles before sunset on Friday, and is ushered in with the recitation of prayers. Its' restfulness is maintained by an emphasis on studying the Torah or Talmud. The Orthodox Jew rejects every effort to define Judaism as merely an ethical or moral code, rather he believes in the unique character of his faith, and in a historical and divine necessity for the survival of the Jewish people.

The Jew has survived many tragedies in part through the strong emphasis on family life and in accepting tradition as the determiner of roles within the family structure. Although friendship patterns with Gentiles

exist, they are limited many times to the work world, while social life takes place within the family circle.

CURRICULUM FOR ORTHODOX JEWISH CULTURE

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I. Films: Titles

Note - Films may be rented by contacting: (A-D)

J.J. Goldberg
American Jewish Congress
15 East 84th Street
New York, New York 10029

A. Chasid
"A sensitive film on the Chasidim of Williamsburg" (J. Green 35 min. Black and White)

B. Black Jews of Elmont (N.J.) "A fascinating look at a fascinating community - Unusual" (Avi Goren 25 min. Color)

C. Aba "A warm portrayal of an old Israeli Jew" (Bernie Limberg 20 min. Color)

D. Bar Mitzvah "Tongue in Cheek impression of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony as viewed by thriteen year olds." (Bernie Finberg 20 min. Color)

Note - Films E-L (Feature Films) and other films can be found in catalogs of the two largest film rental agencies:

Audio Brandon
34 Mac Queston Parkway
Mt. Vernon, New York 10550

Contemporary Films
Princeton Road
Hightstown, New York 08520

E. Impossible on Saturday - Brandon

F. My Father's House - East Coast Productions

G. Exodus - United Artists

H. Diary of Anne Frank - Films, Inc.

I. Judgment at Nurenberg - United Artists

J. Gentleman's Agreement - A.D.L.

K. The Shop on Main Street - J.W.B. (15 E. 26th Street, New York 10010)

L. Fiddler on the Roof

Some of the above films can be seen from time to time at local theaters or on television.

II. Filmstrips

Catalogs for filmstrips dealing with many Jewish subjects, particularly educational, are available from:

Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10021

The Eternal Light
3080 Broadway
New York, New York 10027

III. Films: Sample Activities and Objectives

A. After viewing selective films the student will be able to point out and discuss such issues as:

1. Cultural differences and similarities between Orthodox and middle-class Americans.

2. The main points of the film.

3. Points of interferences which lead to misunderstanding or conflicts between Orthodox Jews and middle-class Americans.

4. To evaluate any changes in their attitudes after viewing the films.

5. Can the students devise ways in which these conflicts can be minimized.

IV. Suggested Readings

A. Hasidism (Eastern Europe)

1. Mintz, Jerome. In Praise of the Bal Shem Tov: The Earliest Collection of Legends about the Founder of Hasidism. Bloomington, Second: Indiana University.

2. Buber, Martin. Tales of the Hasidism: The Early Masters, New York: Schocken, 1947. Collection of Tales.

3. Same as above, "The Later Masters" 1948.

4. Cohen, Arthur A. and Garvin, Philip. A People Apart: Hasidism in America New York: Dutton, 1970. Photographic Essay.

5. Mintz, Jerome. Legends of the Hasidism: An Introduction to Hasidic Culture and Oral Tradition in the New World. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

B. Documentaries

1. Sanders, Ronald. The Downtown Jews, Portrait of an Immigrant Generation. New York Harper, 1969.

2. Schoener, Allon Ed. Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870-1925. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967. Photographic Essay.

3. Golden, Harry. Pictorial History of Jewish Immigrants to N.Y.C. 1900.

4. Frank, Anne. Diary of Anne Frank.

C. Fiction and Short Stories

1. Asch, Sholem (wrote about American and European Jewish life) plays, short stories, novels and historical novels. (Best known novels are: The Nazarene, Three Cities, Motke the Thief, Salvation.

2. Sholem Aleichem - one of the most famous writers of Yiddish Literature. Most famous stories are Tevya the Dairyman, (later known as) Fiddler On The Roof, derived from his writings and characters.

3. Wiesel, Elie. Author of many novels, among which are: Night, The Gates of the Forest; The Town Beyond the Wall.

4. Singer, Isaac Bashevis. Great world literary figure. Writes in Yiddish and works are translated into English. Novels and short stories. Collection of short stories: In My Father's Court, The Seance, Gimpel the Fool; Short Friday. Novels: The Slave; Satan in Goray; The Manor.

5. Potok, Chaim Novels: My Name is Asher Lev; The Chosen; The Promise.

6. Golden, Harry. Prolific writer of stories, novels, documentaries. He's noted for his portrayal of Jewish humor. Among his many works are: Enjoy, Enjoy; Es, Meinkind: For Two Cents Plain; Golden Book of Jewish Humor; The Greatest Jewish City In The World; Long Live Columbus; Travels Through Jewish America.

7. Goodman, Henry, ed. (translator). The New Country: Stories from the Yiddish About Life in America.

D. Yiddish Language

1. Rosten, Leo. The Joys of Yiddish. (Also wrote humorous short novel of immigrant experience in English Night School.) "The Education of Hyman Kaplan."

V. Suggested Readings: Sample Activities and Objectives

A. Book Reports

Student will read at least one book from the list of required readings and will be able

to present an oral and written summary of the book. He will be able to describe:

1. Some traditions in Jewish culture and compare them to average American culture.

B. The student will be able to prepare a dramatization or role playing from a sequence in one of the books depicting a cultural aspect that the student became aware of through the reading.

C. After reading the books the student will be able to list those myths or stereotypes which the book dispels and those values which were supported.

VI. Culture Capsule: Activities

A. After role playing or viewing the attached culture capsule students will be able to participate in discussion of question at the end of the capsule.

B. Students will read and discuss attached "Introduction to Culture Capsule."

C. Students will be able to write their own culture capsules in small groups.

D. Students will be able to analyze their culture capsules.

VII. Music: Activities

A. Concerts:

1. Jewish festival of Arts. It includes a variety of artistic experiences. Garden State Arts Center - Annual Jewish Festival, Judge Donald Meyers, Chairman; Holmdel, New Jersey

2. Radio concerts: WQXR presently broadcasts Israeli and Jewish Liturgical Music from 1:06 - 2:00 P.M. on Sunday afternoons. Consult listings for up-to-date details.

B. Hasidic Music:

1. Students will go to hear Hasidim singing at the Lubavitch or Bobov or Modzits synagogues, located mainly in New York City, and also elsewhere, and get into the music as well as the entire scene. The best time for singing and dancing is Simhat Torah, or if possible, a wedding or some such simha (celebration) in the Hasidic community. At Lubavitch in New York, contact:

Rabbi Shalom Ber Hecht
Machaneh Yisrael House
President Street corner of
Kingston Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11213

2. (For the teachers use) The Jewish Music Council offers information, catalogs, and resources on Jewish music to individuals and groups. Write them at:

National Jewish Welfare Board
15 East 26th Street
New York, New York 10010

VIII. Museum Visits

A. Jewish Museum, 5th Avenue at 92nd Street, New York City. Permanent and everchanging exhibits.

Saturday 11:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.
Sunday and Holidays 1:00 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.

Over 30 tapestries from The Manbush Workshop in Israel, from designs by such artists as Janco, Raltner and Arp. Through April 27.
"The Passover Story," an exhibition celebrating the Biblical story of the Exodus, and features 11 paintings by Ben Shahn (1898-1969). Through April 30.

Mondays-Thursdays 12:00 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.
Sundays 11:00 A.M. - 6:00 P.M.

B. Metropolitan Museum of Art (5th Avenue at 80th Street, New York City) Special Passover Exhibit.

The Passover Story - The Metropolitan Museum will open an exhibition on Tuesday which offers a look at the Jewish home at the time of the Passover Seder. Manuscripts, incunabula and other ritual objects made for the domestic celebration will be on display, including a rare 15th century Haggadah in illuminated manuscript, the earliest example of a printed Haggadah, and a group of gold, silver and ruby wineglasses and goblets from Germany, Italy and Bohemia.

C. Activities

Students will visit museum and will be able to give an oral presentation on the topic he found most interesting.

IX. Holidays

A. Students, in small groups, will research a specific Jewish festival or holiday in regard to traditions, historical background, and food customs.

1. Group reports will be shared. Realia, newspaper articles, photographs, replicas, posters, etc., will be utilized in the presentations.

2. If facilities are available, student will prepare traditional dishes to be shared by class members. Recipes will be made available to all.

B. If possible, exchange of social visits will take place, for first-hand knowledge of the Jewish culture in a home setting (a Holiday or Sabbath meal might be suggested.)

INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE CAPSULES

1. What is a "Culture Capsule?"

   A Culture Capsule is an instructional device consisting of a conversation, or descriptive narrative, in which certain specific cultural features identified with a selected group of people are deliberately constructed for the purpose of analysis.

2. What is the purpose of a "Culture Capsule?"

   A Culture Capsule serves to highlight the values, opinions and attitudes which are common to a group of people, as well as to describe the ways in which such information is conveyed by individuals through behavior or speech.

3. What is the format of a "Culture Capsule?"

   A Culture Capsule may consist of a dialogue or skit illustrating a typical cultural interaction between typical members of the selected group, in a typical everyday situation. It may also consist of a cultural "problem - solving" presentation, in which all the ingredients of a situation are presented, but no solution is included. Or, it may consist of a description of a cultural incident occurring in the selected group.

   In addition, the Capsule may be presented in written form, on tape, or on videotape, or it may be simply dramatized feeling in a classroom by selected students in a role - playing situation.

4. How should a "Culture Capsule" be used?

   It should be used to teach cultural understanding, cultural differences, points of interference in crosscultural communication, and skills in cross-cultural communication, on a step by step basis.

5. What are the components of a "Culture Capsule?"

1. The selected culture setting.

2. The Culture Topic and a description of the situation, background explanation, and basic principles.

3. The type of students for whom the cultural information is intended.

4. A set of "cultural" behavioral objectives.

5. Illustrations of cultural features, symbols, beliefs, attitudes, and the like, to be presented.

6. Presentation:

   Characters
   The dialogue
   The audio-visual materials
   Other media

7. Cultural items to be elicited from the students (in keeping with their level of sophistication.)

8. Suggested questions for discussions:

   a. Related to the physical factors of the situation - (time, place.)

   b. Related to the human factors of the situation - (socio-economic, ethnic, and the like.)

   c. Related to the expression of hidden values, beliefs, and the like, through behavior (gestures, actions, etc.), or speech, (style of delivery, choice of words, etc.)

9. Optional: alternate methods of presentation and activities.

CULTURE CAPSULE ANALYSIS

Viedo Tape or Role-Playing Activity:

1. What are the objectives of this Culture Capsule?
2. What cultural differences and/or cultural points of interference are illustrated?
3. Does the script illustrate a believable cultural interaction between typical members of the selected ethnic groups?
4. Are the following aspects of the videotaped capsule authentically represented?

   Characters
   Dialogue
   Body language (gestures, facial expression, gait, stance, etc.)
   Attitudes, values, opinions and Realia.

5. What alternate methods of presentation and activities?

Written:

1. Is the title appropriate?
2. Is the description of the situation and background information sufficiently clear?
3. Is there a logical sequencing of events?
4. Is there a set of cultural behavioral objectives?
5. Is the culture capsule in keeping with the level of sophistication of the students for whom it is intended?
6. Do the following discussion questions adequately bring out the salient points of the capsule?

THE CEREMONIES MAY BE DIFFERENT, BUT THE FEELING IS THE SAME

(A Comparison Of Rituals Associated With Death Between Orthodox Jews and Catholics)

Objectives: The student will gain knowledge about differing customs surrounding death in the family. The student will compare and contrast roles and norms concerning death in two separate cultures.

Cast: Mary, a Catholic girl of Irish descent.
Sheilla, a Jewess.

Both girls are students at a large High School in a metropolitan area. Their meeting takes place on the way home from school.

Mary: Sheilla, Hi! I haven't seen you lately.

Sheilla: Mary, my grandmother died, so I was home with the family for a few days.

Mary: Gee, I'm sorry to hear that. I never met your grandmother, but I know from all the things you told me about her, she was a really good person. She was a good cook too. That cake you brought in that she made was delicious. I'll say a prayer for her.

Sheilla: Thanks, Mary. At least she didn't suffer. It was all over in a few hours.

Mary: Did you have a big funeral? I remember when my grandmother died we had one car just filled with flowers going to the cemetery. My grandmother died at home too. I was really scared when the priest came to the house to absolve her. I knew she was dying when I saw him come. But seeing the priest really made her happy and peaceful.

Sheilla: Well, Mary, our customs are quite different. Our custom is to rip our clothes at the moment of death.

Mary: Why?

Sheilla: It is the traditional act of mourning and grief. You know, my grandmother also said a confession before dying. It is a prayer, "Understand, O Isreal, the Lord our God is one, I acknowledge you." She asked that her death be an atonement for her sins.

Mary: My grandmother also made her last confession. Tell me some more about your customs.

Sheilla: Well, all mirrors are covered and the body is not left alone until the moment of burial.

Mary: Like the Irish wake!

Sheilla: Jewish tradition also requires that the burial is simple. The deceased is buried in a simple shroud. Men are buried with a tallit over the shroud and the coffin is made of pinewood. There is no viewing, and the body is buried within 24 hours.

Mary: I think that is a good idea. We all were so sad sitting around that funeral parlor for three days. I'd much rather remember my grandmother the way she looked when she was alive.

Sheilla: A common Jewish custom is to stop seven times with the coffin. The number seven symbolizes the word "hevel" (utter futility.)

Mary: When my grandmother died the funeral procession circled the block where she lived and stopped at her house before going on to the ceremony at the cemetery.

Sheilla: I was telling you about the association of the number seven. This number is also associated with Shivah, the seven day period of mourning. Friends kept coming to our house to keep us company. Now my father will be reciting the Kaddish at all public services for the next eleven months.

Mary: I really think some of your customs make a lot of sense. I am probably more comfortable with mine, but the main thing Sheilla is that I hope both your grandmother and mine go to Heaven and meet there.

Sheilla: Who knows? They may be friends already.

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